



Handling the Deadly Virus: Our Priorities (PEOPLE OR THE ECONOMY. WE WILL HAVE TO CHOOSE THE BEST)

By Chandra Das CP

The present lockdown in the USA, India, and other countries around the globe due to coronavirus has really paralyzed the entire humanity. I am now with my son Gopal and his family at Memphis for nearly a decade as a green card holder, and life to me was really a present all these years. I am from the southern part of India. I feel I am being quarantined, physically as well. I have my relatives in India, and in the last few years, I have also developed many well-wishers and friends in the USA. The dangerous epidemic has now curbed all my activities due to the emergency here and the rules imposed by the government restricting my movements and others around to curb the spread of the virus in the larger interests of the nation.

I was planning to go to India in the first week of April, but that was canceled. Now the US administration has announced the withdrawal of restrictions since May 4 in some states, including the state of Tennessee. This was done in spite of the reality that the number of deaths has only increased from the previous month.

The US President has recently admitted in his press conference that the number of deaths in all probability might even double in the coming month. Right thinking people in this backdrop might ask one important question. Is it not more prudent to postpone the withdrawal?

Social distancing is currently the only medicine to arrest the spread of the epidemic as standard medicines are not there in the market for treatment. By withdrawing the current restrictions, the social distancing concept will be given a burial. The President again hopes the standard medicine will become available by next January. After the press meeting of the President, the scholars at the University of Washington have met and expressed the view that the deaths due to the disease will move up in June, possibly due to the withdrawal of restrictions and other data available to them. On withdrawal, the general public would prefer to do shopping as before, attend music festivals, go to the theaters to see the movies on the big screen and the situation might go out of control to the authorities concerned. The right medicine is not there in the market, and it might take some time for scientists in the pharmaceutical companies to market the appropriate medicine to help the several thousand who are now being watched and quarantined. Right thinking people are now really frightened about their survival in this explosive situation.

The federal government and the state governments have taken preventive measures to the maximum within the present infrastructure, and this writer feels that the present withdrawal might boomerang and pose dangers to the nation.

There should be people to develop a country and the economy, and the main stress by the policymakers now to develop the economy may not yield the expected results if the death toll shoots up. It is true, there is terrible pressure from a section of the general public on the government, for relaxation of rules due to job losses and production loss, but those in the corridors of power will have to weigh the scales properly in a highly judicial manner. In India, the central government and the state governments have declared an emergency and enforced the concept of social distancing strictly since the beginning when the spread was noticed in March. In spite of the multiplicity of political parties there, the policymakers were able to control the epidemic in an admirable manner. To give real life to the concept of social distancing, traffic by rail and through roads in buses stopped at the national level and the government made arrangements to screen all the suspected cases in government hospitals at government costs. Even the private hospitals were directed to transfer the suspected cases to the government hospitals and this centralized approach helped the government to control the epidemic within the shortest time possible. The route maps of all the suspected cases in the country were there in the data bank and the government officials kept track of the data to root out the virus. The travelers who came from other countries in planes were screened at the ports, and the suspected cases were taken straight away to the special

hospitals for treatment. Those who escaped from the hospitals were immediately traced. All the patients were given food by the government or voluntary agencies as well and this again proved beneficial. The workers who were denied employment were also given food and shelter, and recently special trains were run from one end to the other end to help the migrant labor. The case of each patient was screened to isolate them from others. The treatment was free to all the patients, including the foreigners. The biggest professional business house in India handed over the most luxurious hotel in India at Mumbai to the government to help the doctors for their stay and work during this period.

Many big business houses and society leaders donated large amounts to the central and state governments to meet the unforeseen expenses during this period. The President of India, the Prime minister, the Chief Justice of India, the governors of states, the entire central cabinet, several chief ministers, members of parliament, state legislatures, the big temples and churches with large reserves donated liberally to the government to help the sick. The stress was on helping the people in distress. And the same efforts continue even now. The prime minister stressed on the development of people as he was confident that the economy would automatically develop if the people were taken care of properly. The results were heartwarming in the most densely populated democracy around the globe. The number of human losses due to corona is the least at this point in time. The fourth estate in other countries praised India for these Himalayan efforts. The government of India in consultation with all the states has now

decided to lift the lockdown on May 17 with a rider that the Government will not fail in their efforts to help the people.

While reflecting on the present disaster, my memory goes back nearly five decades back, while at Chennai, I came across a book titled *Business is People*, a book on people and their growth in the industrial scenario. That was authored by a senior executive from the house of TATAS, wedded to professionalism. The principles enunciated therein are still relevant. Give a lift to the people. That will result in all-round growth.

